

Genocide of the Herero in German Southwest Africa in 1904? Based on many works of the usually uncritical colonial literature of the Kaiser period as well as on the publications of the English war propagandists during the First World War, especially the Marxist historians of the German Democratic Republic created the so-called Omaheke legend. To this day, it dominates both the historiography conforming to the zeitgeist and the usual journalism – and by no means only in the Federal Republic of Germany. According to the legend, the Kaiserliche Schutztruppe in German Southwest Africa, after a "Kesselschlacht" at the Waterberg on August 11, 1904, by "planned operations" and without leaving an "alternative to escape", rushed the mass of the Herero people into the "waterless Omaheke", where they perished miserably from hunger and thirst, except for a few scraps. Four examples are cited here as representative of the common assertions: > The journalist Philip Ngunjiri said in October 2002 that although Germany had joined the ranks of the colonial powers very late, it had ultimately become the colonial record-holder for the most horrific atrocities in Africa: "For twenty years, German settlers had pushed inland with impunity, stealing land and cattle, raping women, lynching men, and calling them >baboons< to their faces.... Lieutenant General Lothar VON TROTHA. ... pushed the Herero guerrillas and their families north to the Waterberg and attacked them there from three sides. He left only one exit open, the one into the Omaheke. When the Herero fled there, he poisoned the water holes, set up patrols along a 150-mile stretch and bayoneted anyone who crawled out of the desert."1 > The socialist publicist Tom SANDERS, on the other hand, first states quite factually that "25,000 members" of the Herero people, "including women and children" had gathered at Waterberg, but then continues in a clichéd manner: "VON TROTHA succeeded in pushing the people into the desert, where he had previously poisoned the few water sources. His troops trapped the Herero in the desert, where they died by the thousands. Consequently, VON TROTHA's tactics proved to be genocidal. He established 150 miles of German patrol posts that held the Herero in the desert.... Men who escaped the desert were lynched Ku Klux Klan style."2 – According to the BBC, one of the largest broadcasters in the world, the Germans "drove" the Herero into the Omaheke, "sealed off" the last water holes, and even "erected a fence" to prevent the Herero from escaping.3 – Furthermore, the Germans had crammed captured Herero into "concentration camps" and tortured them there. In this miserable way, "genocide" would have reached its climax. The African Unification Front describes this scale of atrocity as follows: "The women and girls of the Herero and Nama were interned in concentration camps where they were raped by the German troops, while the men and boys were tortured and murdered. This type of treatment of Africans was later applied to Jews and other enemies of the Nazi regime in Germany. By the same troop units that had carried out their deadly handiwork in Africa."4 Do these serious allegations correspond to historical facts? Before the accusations made by the supporters and advocates of the genocide thesis (exterminationists) can be examined, it is first necessary to clarify the actual size of the Herero population at the Waterberg, since it provides information about the total strength of this then still largely nomadic people. On the part of the exterminationists, the number of victims is arbitrarily used in a shady way. When von Trotha's "murderous hordes finished their job" in 1906, the journalist Baffour ANKOMAH claims, less than 20,000 of the 80,000 Herero still existing in 1903 remained.5 Peter Carstens, lecturer at the University of Toronto, increases the number of victims without citing scientific evidence: "When the rebellion was suppressed in 1907, the number of Herero in the colony had been reduced from 100,000 to 25,000."6 Of all people, the currently reigning chief Kuaima Riruako, who is by no means recognized by all Herero, thought he had to cauterize even these exaggerated figures into the astronomical. In 2001, he told the German daily newspaper Die Welt: "According to research, we would be a nation of two million people today, but instead we are only between 400,000 and 500,000."7 A look at the official statistics of Namibia shows how much of a fantasy such statements are: According to the latest official publications,

Namibia today has a population of 1.8 million inhabitants, of which about 100,000 are members of the Herero people.⁸ These vivid examples clearly show that numbers are used arbitrarily and that they are adapted to one's own interests. In the past, Germans as well as non-Germans have shown the necessary objectivity, on the basis of which one could work today. The missionary Friedrich Bernsmann, for example, had estimated the total number of Herero at 35,000 shortly before the outbreak of the uprising and went on to say that 23,000 to 25,000 of these had survived the uprising.⁹ With this information, the missionary already comes very close to the truth! The British historian G. L. Steer, who was not exactly friendly towards the Germans, assumed a Herero force at the Waterberg that was altogether "2500 old rifles" strong.¹⁰ This is a very realistic estimate in terms of population size, which is underlined by the actual number of Herero encountered after the battles. Even if one wants to concede to the then warring chief Samuel Maharero to have gathered around him the almost gigantic number of 4,000 to 4,500 warriors, and if one further assumes that for each of these warriors there were on average five or six unarmed family members – a huge number, which, by the way, is also the assumption of many advocates of the genocide thesis¹¹ –, then at the Waterberg in August 1904 at the most 24,000 to about 30,000 Herero had gathered. In this case, Maharero is already credited with having gathered almost all members of his people around him at the Waterberg, which is very improbable in view of the fact that quite a number of yards did not take part in the uprisings or did not take part at all. It does not correspond to the historical truth that "the Herero" as a whole rose up against "the Germans" or took part in the fights against them.¹² Objectively calculated, in August 1904 hardly less than 12000 (according to Steer) and, if one wants to take the above mentioned accommodating admission, at most 30000 Herero could have gathered at the Waterberg. It will not be possible to determine an exact number. But if you take the average of these two extreme numbers as a guideline, you will get a realistic starting point to judge the further historical events with about 21000 Herero. The correctness of the number 21000 is also and especially underlined by the geographic and ecological conditions: The Waterberg owes its name to the relatively many water sources in this area. Of course, it did not offer water in unlimited quantities. Even the wealthy chief KAMBAZEMBI, who lived at the Waterberg, had to drive his cattle, according to estimations about 5000 to 12000 animals, often into the area of Otavi, Otjikoto and Grootfontein, in order to find sufficient possibilities for watering his cattle¹ – which makes clear, how limited the water resources at the Waterberg were (and still are) and did not provide water for "many tens of thousands of people and hundreds of thousands of animals", as the Exterminationists claim, especially not for many months. It is therefore proven that already because of the limited pasture conditions and the equally limited water supply at the Waterberg it was not possible that at the time of the battles in this area more than about 21000 Herero could have gathered with about the same amount of large cattle. It is true that a large number of these animals died. The main cause of the death of the cattle in the Omaheke, however, is not exclusively due to a chronic lack of water, but actually to poisoning, which, however, cannot be traced back to German influence. The poisonous plant Makou, also known in southern Africa as "gifblaar" or "poison leaf" (scientific name: *Dichapetalum gmosum*), seems to be of much greater importance in this respect than it has so far been accorded in historiography. Found in subtropical, arid environments, this plant forms succulent green leaves on sandy soil that contain a toxin called monofluoracea that attacks the heart and nervous system of herbivores. The plant is most toxic when it forms young leaves, as it does in spring – in Southwest Africa just mid-August through October! – is the case. Poisoned animals are often restless, hypersensitive, have very fast breathing and tremble.¹⁴ Only if the animals get a lot of rest after eating this deadly plant, there is a chance of recovery. Since this could not be the case, since the Herero had to urge their cattle to hurry if they did not want to fall into German captivity, there is no question that the consumption of the Makou was a major cause for the death of many animals and not the alleged poisoning of the water

points by the Germans. The core of the genocide thesis is the alleged agitation with which the Germans "drove" the Herero into the Omaheke after the battles at the Waterberg on August 11, 1904. This "driving in" never took place! There was no effective "persecution" of the Herero by the German Schutztruppe; at most the Germans stayed on the tracks of the Herero. Even more so, there was no "pushing" of the Herero into the sand field; parts of the troops followed the Herero only after weeks. The distance from Waterberg to Osombo Windimbe, where Lieutenant General Lothar VON TROTHA addressed his infamous but factually trivial appeal to the Herero people to some undecided stragglers he still found, is about 220 kilometers. This was to be covered on foot in about seven days. When von Trotha finally arrived at Osombo Windimbe barely two months after the battles on the Waterberg, the majority of the Herero in question were already scattered east of the British border or in the southwest African bush!

At the time of the announcement of the call to the Herero, Samuel Maharero and his group had already been 300 kilometers further northeast on British territory for a week. It thus contradicts the historical facts to claim that the German troops "rushed" the Herero into the Omaheke, "surrounded" the Omaheke itself and prevented a "flooding back" of the enemy – if possible still by means of an erected fence. The retreat of the Herero under Samuel Maharero to the southeast in the direction of Betschuanaland was not accidental or forced, but had been prepared long ago. The South African historian Gerhardus Pool drew attention to the fact that Maharero had already assured himself of British friendship at the time of the outbreak of the uprising by promising to spare the British and South Africans. He wanted to retain the sympathy of the British so that Betschuanaland – and Walvis Bay – would remain as places of refuge for his people in the event of a German victory. In fact, a migration of the Herero had already begun many months, even decades before the battles at the Waterberg: Via the so-called Ngami Trail, the path through the Omaheke to Lake Ngami in Betschuanaland, Herero groups with their cattle had been migrating to British territory again and again since about 1900. These events are also confirmed in the *Deutsches Kolonialblatt*. In the issue of February 15, 1905, it states, referring to a communication of the High Commissioner in South Africa of November 1904, that "the number of Hereros who fled in the vicinity of Lake Ngami, including women and children, would amount to about 1800." In fact, the Herero had entered the Betschuana Protectorate by the routes known to them, not in large crowds, but in many small groups of up to twenty people. One route they used was the Ombakaha-Otjimanamgombe-Rietfontein route, the other was the Epata-Omuramba route via Onjeinje to the Okavango. Most crossed over into English territory at Rietfontein. In addition to these Betschuana refugees, diving Herero must have taken place in the dense bush, which was almost impenetrable for whites. Even a year and a half after the battles at the Waterberg, the Germans encountered hundreds of Herero who were by no means wandering "helplessly and restlessly", but were leading a sovereign life in their shipyards.¹ It cannot be inferred from corroborated sources that "the" Herero were "massacred" by "the" Germans. Claims to the contrary are based primarily on the so-called Blue Book, the relevant British propaganda work of the First World War.² Hans Germani, a well-known journalist for the German daily *Die Welt*, spoke in the late 1970s with the president of the opposition party, the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), Chief Clemens Kapuuo, about the political situation and history of Southwest Africa. Germani asked the Herero chief what he as a Herero actually felt towards the Germans – the people who were accused of having committed genocide against his people. Kapuuo answered: "You know, that is actually nonsense. We are two warrior peoples, the best here in the southwest. We fought against each other at that time, you were the strongest. Certainly, many of us died fleeing across the desert – but what's the point? One should avoid digging in old graves, there never comes out a future. Look at my Herero today. They still put on old German uniforms during strange Sunday exercises, have ranks, >Leutnanti<, >oberleutnanti<,"

>Hopp- mann<, >Majora<. They even wear the >Affenschaukel<, the shoulder bands of the German Generalstäbler. Basically, we have a deep respect for the Germans." The high esteem in which the Germans are held among the Herero is precisely due to the behavior of the Germans toward the Herero. In a letter to the editor in the Windhuker Allgemeine Zeitung of July 28, 1961, R. Sarnow, a former member of the Schutztruppen who served under Major Ludwig von Estorff, wrote from Tsumeb, "that every Herero man, woman or child who surrendered was sent to the mission stations and fed there.... We German soldiers were not an undisciplined sol- dateska who murdered senselessly, but an absolutely disciplined troop who did no harm to any unarmed Herero. That is a very mean distortion! Any soldier guilty of such murder would inevitably have been court-martialed and severely punished." "But whoever believes," the colonial chronicler Maximilian Bayer confesses in addition, "that our horsemen of the Schutztruppe, whose hard job it was to bring retribution with a fighting hand, had no compassion for the jam- mer of the underdog, does not know the mind of the German soldier. "1 Indeed! In practice, the firearm was only used on armed Herero. Furthermore, scattered parts of "Herero gangs" were by no means "mowed down", but taken away as prisoners. Armed Herero who surrendered were treated correctly under the law of war and were by no means "slaughtered", as the exterminationists would have us believe. Divisional priest Max Schmidt reports that a few days before General Lieutenant von Trotha addressed his proclamation to the Herero people, some prisoners were brought in: "They showed great calm and some even mocking insolence. Oberleutnant Volkmann interrogates them through an interpreter, although this old African himself understands something of the Herero language. "2 After the interrogation, the prisoners were tied to the ammunition wagons and carried along - and not "massacred". The general humane attitude of the German soldiers is described by Private Paul HARR-LAND using the example of a prisoner transport from Otjimbinde to Okahandja in January 1905: "Here, once again, the consistently good-natured attitude of the German soldiers became apparent, who gave the poor people everything they needed and shared it with them. Hunger and hunger again! We felt sorry for the children, who were not responsible for anything. Only the proud >grandmen< were not in need. One of them was dressed in a very good black frock coat, while the others wore impeccably washed troop suits. As we marched on, the proud big men did not disdain to beg for food from us, which was readily given. Among them all, a young woman, emaciated to the skeleton, aroused the pity of all comrades. With childlike love, she led her old, blinded mother by an ox-strap. "3 Last but not least, the commitment of the German transport teams to bring as large a number of captured Herero as possible to the reception camps speaks against the thesis of the "extermination" of natives. After the skirmish of Okowindombo on September 5, 1904 - thus in the midst of the "persecution" of the Herero by the Schutztruppe! - the typical behavior of the Germans towards the Herero. At the watering hole squatted "a number of prisoners: some men, several women and children. The women were wearing clothes that had obviously been stolen from the stores or cupboards of looted farms. .. The prisoners were interrogated, but not a hair was touched - just as I have always experienced during these weeks. I even saw that starved prisoners were fed and, if they were women or old men, released unmolested, yes, protected from the deceitfulness of our native drivers and bamboos, who begrudged the prisoners such protection, with all possible vigor. Often I saw Herero boys who had been left behind in the dockyard by their fugitive relatives and were now happily doing small services for the troops. They did not suffer from hunger, and our doctors took care of them. "20 First Lieutenant Erich von Salzmänn reports another characteristic case. Near Owikokorero, the Germans found two native women at a hidden watering hole in the bush. Their husbands had run away. One woman "had a baby with her that was about a week old and looked pitiful. She soon realized that we took pity on her, so she was lucky in her attempts at begging, which involved raising her arms imploringly. We gave her corned beef, of which we still had plenty, and she filled her belly with it. "21

In the primary literature, we repeatedly come across evidence that German soldiers exercised a pronounced human attitude toward children in particular. Captain Bayer, for example, reports an impressive example that occurred during the persecution of the Herero and which should be used here as a conclusion for the many similar behavioral measures: "At a waterhole sat a Herero child of about 4 years old and looked at us with wide, astonished eyes. We had to stop here for a moment; our protection troopers curiously surrounded the baby and thought about how to save it from certain death by thirst. Finally one of them, a fellow countryman of mine from Baden, said: >Then we have to look for a mother for the child.< Quickly a few horsemen ran into the bushes and soon, laughing triumphantly and happily, brought up an old Herero woman, a wizened, shriveled female, to whom they put the child on her lap. Then they brought in a dairy goat, and an expert began to milk it. The limp udder gave about a quarter cup full; they gave that to the child. They tied a rope around the goat's neck and put the end of the rope in the hand of the herero woman. It was a pretty sight: The old Herero woman, laughing all over her face, the child and the dairy goat; in front of them our soldiers, who rejoiced at the peaceful picture."22 No less a personage than Colonel Berthold von Deimling, who as a general had already joined the German Democratic Party (DDP) defending the Weimar Republic in 1918, helped form the Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold fighting association close to the SPD in 1924, and later professed pacifism, confirms that despite the bestiality the Herero had shown toward German prisoners and wounded, a total of thousands of Herero were captured and treated humanely: "Innocent, defenseless prisoners and women have always been treated humanely and with the greatest patience; I have often seen our people sharing their little water and their little food with the prisoners."23 The humane attitude of the German soldiers was well known among the surrendering Herero and the captured Herero. Apart from documented German sources, there are also impressive and, above all, authentic (!) Herero sources that acknowledge the general humane attitude of the members of the Kaiserliche Schutztruppe. They all confirm the opposite of the accusations of alleged maltreatment and atrocities. In this regard, one should recall the statements of the important evangelist Andreas Kukuri1, who had crossed the Omaheke in September 1904 as a young boy, or the statements of the Herero elders, who were interviewed in the mid-1980s in the context of the Michael Scott Project.2 Of particular note is the characteristic testimony of AMANDA, the educated daughter of Captain ZACHARIAS of Otjimbingwe, who admitted to having allowed herself to be captured because she knew that German soldiers were not harming Herero women.3 During the Herero uprising, the British military attaché Colonel Trench had been on the scene: He was with the headquarters4 directly at the front for many months and accordingly was an eyewitness to the fighting. Who - if not he - would have been a credible witness to any human rights violations? However, in the authoritative archives in Windhoek and London, but also in Pretoria, there are no documents that give even the slightest indication that this high-ranking officer would have reported observed atrocities to his superiors in London! This fact is of elementary importance, because it is self-evident that Trench - if there had been incidents which could even remotely be connected with maltreatment or even with genocide - would have reported these crimes to his office with 100% certainty and would not have concealed them. The fact that there are no authentic reports in this regard is of course logical, since there was no genocide committed by Germans during the suppression of the Herero uprising. Claus Nordbruch